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SUBJECT: (C) UPDATE ON UIGHUR ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN CAMBODIA

REF: PHNOM PENH 913

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CAROL A. RODLEY FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Representatives of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) are close to finding a new location for the Uighur asylum-seekers in Phnom Penh that would offer improved protection. According to UNHCR, the goal is to house the Uighurs in a separate, single house and officials have identified two possible locations. They are working toward finalizing a contract one of the properties. In the meantime, to improve protection for the group immediately, the group is being moved December 16 to UNHCR's Montagnard Site 3, the last remaining Montagnard site in Phnom Penh, which houses approximately 90 Montagnard asylum-seekers and refugees. The move to Site 3 is a temporary relocation, as a separate dwelling is believed to be the best solution for the Uighurs. During the move, it was discovered that two Uighurs were no longer present, and are believed to have run away on their own.

¶2. (C) Refugee assistance groups expressed some concern about the issue of access to the Uighurs once they are moved to a new location. In conversation, UNHCR officials are not committing to maintaining access to the Uighurs by those providing humanitarian assistance, or the Uighurs' access to outside legal representation. UNHCR says these concerns are "under discussion" and ultimately for the RGC to decide. UNHCR Senior Protection Officer Toshi Kawauchi told Poloff the most important issue is finding a secure place for the Uighurs first, and then they will turn to considerations of access. (COMMENT: Post believes it is crucial to establish rules of access from the outset, before the group is moved, rather than trying to break through a barrier once the group relocates. We understand Bangkok RefCoord Office is engaging Bangkok UNHCR on this issue. END COMMENT.)

¶3. (SBU) The Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) publicly confirmed Chinese government interest in the case on December 14. MFA spokesman Koy Kuong said the Chinese Embassy in Phnom Penh sent a diplomatic note referring to the "Uighur Chinese," but did not release the contents of the note. On December 15, a spokeswoman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry stated that the Uighurs are "involved in crimes," and "the international refugee protection system should not be a haven for criminals to evade legal sanctions."

¶4. (SBU) The RGC has maintained that it will not return any Uighur to China who is determined to have a legitimate political asylum claim, nor will they return anyone facing prosecution for those crimes in which the death sentence is a penalty. MFA spokesman Koy Kuong told the local press on December 15 that "the Cambodian government has not made any decision yet. We are waiting until interviews are done to find the real status of these people." (NOTE: Post will

1 speak with contacts working with the Uighurs to learn more  
about the asylum-seekers' personal histories. END NOTE.)  
RODLEY